



The Cleveland Museum of Art

October 27, 1995

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POUSSIN: WORKS ON PAPER

DRAWINGS FROM THE COLLECTION OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
November 22, 1995 - January 24, 1996

Starting the day before Thanksgiving, the Cleveland Museum of Art will host an important exhibition of sixty-five drawings by the painter some believe is the greatest French artist of all time, Nicolas Poussin. Chosen from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle, these magnificent drawings have never been exhibited as a group in the United States. **Poussin: Works on Paper, Drawings from the Collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**, organized to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Poussin's birth, opens November 22, 1995, and will remain on view through January 24, 1996. The exhibition is free.

Diane De Grazia, the Cleveland museum's chief curator and curator of drawings, says of the exhibition and its subject:

In this first show to come to Cleveland from Windsor Castle's great collection of Old Masters, we will be able to see works by a man who was clearly the greatest artist of 17th-century France, and, as an expatriate in Rome, was one of the greatest European painters there at the height of the Baroque. Along with the Renaissance master Raphael and the artists of ancient Greece and Rome, Poussin served as the role model for painters pursuing the classical ideal until the 19th century. His combination of theory and craft, arcane subject matter, and beauty of presentation in his work were and remain unique. The guiding light of French rationalism can be seen in Poussin's dedication to classical principles.

Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) was a contemporary and peer of artists who have become better known to the modern-day public, such as Italy's Gianlorenzo Bernini (whom Poussin knew) and Holland's Rembrandt van Rijn. This exhibition examines his career from his early years in Paris and Rome, through his return to France as painter to Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu, then to his final years in Rome. Unlike most artists whose fame led to numerous commissions, Poussin almost always worked alone rather than overseeing a studio of assistants.

Poussin was convinced that the extraordinary emotional content of his scenes-- usually the moment he believed held the greatest psychological tension in a classical myth

or religious story--could be conveyed through his subjects' gestures. Inasmuch as Poussin's goal in working with pen and ink, wash, or chalk on paper was always to eventually create a painting, many of his drawings picture almost faceless characters, in thoughtfully chosen poses, whose features and expressions he would fill in later, when painting.

Poussin's "perspective"--that combination of techniques painters must master to convey three-dimensional objects and depth perception on a two-dimensional surface--was always rationally determined, because he literally saw his compositions in advance. He explored the relationships of figures by arranging and rearranging small, draped, wax models on a miniature stage, then making drawings of a variety of these tableaux until he found the most satisfying. The virtual absence of individual figure and drapery studies in collections of Poussin drawings (the discovery of such a figure on the verso of one of the Windsor drawings is an exception) makes it apparent that his vision and talent enabled him to proceed directly from drawings of complex compositions to painting on canvas.

The Royal Library at Windsor Castle holds over 30,000 Old Master drawings and watercolors collected over the centuries. Its approximately eighty works by Poussin, from which this show was selected, came into the collection mostly in the 18th century. This group of Poussin drawings ranks in artistic importance with those at the Musée du Louvre in Paris and at the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. The exhibition and accompanying catalogue capitalize on recent scholarship emerging from the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the artist's birth, and from extensive conservation efforts including removing nearly all the drawings from their old mounts, which revealed watermarks and previously hidden sketches.

The Cleveland museum owns three paintings by Poussin. The great masterpiece of his mature style, *The Holy Family on the Steps* (1648), epitomizes the inspiration Poussin took from Roman antiquity and from the High Renaissance masters, and the perfection he achieved through numerous studies and meticulous exploration. (*The Holy Family on the Steps* is on loan to the Louvre until 1997.) Two earlier paintings, *Nymphs and a Satyr* and *The Return of the Holy Family to Nazareth*, are on view in the museum's large Baroque gallery, number 220.

POUSSIN DRAWINGS AT CMA, CONT.

Two members of the Cleveland museum's department of education and public programs will deliver talks in the exhibition:

Wed/Dec 6, 1:30 pm	Nancy McAfee
Thu/Dec 7, 2:30 pm	Nancy McAfee
Sun/Dec 10, 1:30 pm	Nancy McAfee
Wed/Jan 17, 1:30 pm	Patricia Ashton
Thu/Jan 18, 2:30 pm	Patricia Ashton
Sun/Jan 21, 1:30 pm	Patricia Ashton

The exhibition's fully illustrated catalogue was written by Martin Clayton, assistant curator of prints and drawings at the Royal Library. *Poussin: Works on Paper* is available in the Museum Store for \$35 (paperback) or \$65 (clothbound).

After Cleveland, the exhibition will travel to The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (February 6-March 31, 1996).

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Poussin: Works on Paper, Drawings from the Collection of Her Royal Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has been organized by The Royal Library at Windsor Castle in conjunction with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. National funding has been provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

The Cleveland presentation of *Poussin: Works on Paper* is sponsored by the Women's Council of the Cleveland Museum of Art.

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